

# Be a *Happier* and a *Better* Person *without* Formal Religion

*An agnostic view with the Christianity and Islamic  
perspectives*

Despite being an engineering professor, the author has deep social analysis. He focuses mostly in his personal experience and opinion. This book is not about bashing Christianity or Islam. In fact it consists of rich information about similarities and differences between the two. Readers lacking the background knowledge of Christianity and Islam will learn both the ugly and the noble faces of the two religions. how religious people see non believers, what God's problems in modern society, the very basic characteristics of all-loving and fairness, and the consequences of accepting science. Finally, he concluded that he could be a better person: by being distancing himself from institutionalized religion.



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*By. Yunan Prawoto*

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## *Preface:*

*Despite being an engineering professor, I have always been a religious person. It was the time that had been prevented me from writing religious book. Many people might not agree with me that this is a religious book. Well, because I came from a conservative country, where atheist or agnostic books have no place in the book stores.*

*While the vast majority of people in my country, or even in the world automatically and unquestioningly inherit their religion from their parents. I grew up little bit differently. I moved from one place to another where local beliefs were completely different from mine. Therefore, I absorbed the local beliefs quickly and eventually broaden my view.*

*In this book, I am focusing mostly in my personal experience and opinion. I am intentionally limiting myself from referring to other people's works, especially Atheist authors. Although in engineering writing I always refer to them a lot. In no way that I try to be judgmental and insulting about the two religions that once near and dear to my heart, Christianity and Islam. This book is not about bashing Christianity or Islam.*

*I am hopeful that this book will enlighten broad readers. Not only for readers with Christianity and Islamic back grounds, but also all readers with other backgrounds: Judaism, Hinduism, Buddhism, Zoroastria, Sabia, Ismaili, Paganism, Shikhism, Shinto, Scientology and all other beliefs that I am not aware of. Humanism is, as far as I know, one of the elements in every religion and belief.*

*I am thankful to my wife and my daughters who even during my standing without belief, they remain supportive to me.*

*Yunan Prawoto*

## *Chapter one. Are the Believers Better than the Non-Believers?*



*The year was 2006, and the season was Fall. My family and I lived in one of the small cities in Midwest in the US; Wixom, Michigan. I worked as a manager of Research and Development for NTK International Corporation. It is a suspension company that supplies to car manufacturers that their head offices and R&Ds are located around Detroit.*

*We lived in a quiet community of upper middle class of America. Mostly religious people they are. Although we are a muslim family, we feel secure and comfortable. I raised a happy family with two teenage daughters attending public schools. The neighborhood was so quiet despite it was clearly a 'republicans' neighborhood....*

*People are proudly waving the US flags. During the election, I also noticed that there was small vandalism where the yards of one of my neighbors that display the democrat candidate was knocked down using some sort of baseball bat. I know that Bush was popular in the neighborhood. Not sure if Ann Coulter and Daniel Pipe were too...*

Apart from that minor incident, I think it was very comfortable to live. I remember one morning, playing a guitar while watching CBS morning news. It was weekend for sure, because I was relaxing playing "Hotel California" with my acoustic guitar. The news was making me pausing playing guitar.

"An escort and masseur Mike Jones alleged that Haggard had paid Jones to engage in sex with him for three years and had also purchased and used drugs."

Later on, I discovered it was crystal methamphetamine I think. Jones said he had only recently learned of Haggard's true identity, and explained his reasons for coming forward by saying,

"It made me angry that here's someone preaching against gay marriage and going behind the scenes having gay sex."

This case was very interesting to me, because I was at the peak of having interest spiritually. I did not discriminate myself as a muslim. Because I learned from my mom that being a muslim is a friend of Christians anyway. So, I never missed any news about this Haggard allegation. Jones made the allegations public in response to Haggard's political support for a Colorado Amendment 43 on the November 7, 2006 Colorado ballot that would ban same-sex marriage in that state. Jones told the News,

"I had to expose the hypocrisy. He is in the position of influence of millions of followers, and he's preaching against gay marriage. But behind everybody's back [he's] doing what he's preached against."



Jones hoped that his statements would sway voters. Eventually, Haggard acknowledged almost all of the allegations against him, including using meth [1]. Certainly, Haggard's immediate response was denial. He told the television station,

"I did not have a homosexual relationship with a man in Denver . . . I am steady with my wife. I'm faithful to my wife."

Haggard also added,

"I have never done drugs--ever. Not even in high school. I didn't smoke pot. I didn't do anything like that. I'm not a drug man. We're not a drinking family. I don't smoke cigarettes. I don't socially drink. We don't socially drink. We don't have wine in our house. We don't do that kind of thing."

Cornered by his voicemail to Mike Jones requesting meth, Haggard told the press,

"I bought it for myself but never used it. I was tempted but I never used it."

Haggard claimed he bought the meth but threw it away. Haggard claimed he had never met his accuser. Jones volunteered to take a polygraph test on a KHOW radio show hosted by Peter Boyles, where Jones first made the allegations. However, Jones's responses during the section of the polygraph test about whether he had engaged in sex with Haggard indicated deception. The test administrator, John Kresnik, discounted the test results because of Jones's stress and lack of eating or sleeping. Regardless, Haggard responded by saying,

"We're so grateful that he failed a polygraph test this morning, my accuser did."

Jones was not asked questions about drug use. Jones expressed doubt that he would retake the test, saying

"I've made my point. He's the one who has discredited himself. He should admit it and move on."

Haggard initially claimed he had never heard of his accuser and denied having ever done drugs and stated

"I have not, I have never had a gay relationship with anybody."

Many evangelical leaders showed support for Haggard and were critical of media reports. Despite his protestations, Haggard resigned from all of his leadership positions in religious organizations and was fired from his position as Senior Pastor of the church he founded. Haggard later resigned as president of the National Association of Evangelicals. He went on administrative leave from his position as senior pastor of New Life Church, saying

"I am voluntarily stepping aside from leadership so that the overseer process can be allowed to proceed with integrity. I hope to be able to discuss this matter in more detail at a later date. In the interim, I will seek both spiritual advice and guidance."

On November 2, 2006, senior church officials told Colorado Springs television station KKTV that Haggard has admitted to some of the claims made by Jones [2].

I was hopeful that all the accusations were not true.... Sadly,... NONE of THEM was UNTRUE...

Born In 1978, Haggard married Gayle Alcorn. The couple has five children: Christy (1981), Marcus (1983), Jonathan (1987), Alex (1990), and Elliott (1993). According to the public records of the El Paso County Tax Assessor, Ted Haggard owns a home valued well above at \$700,000 USD, which is more than three times of our house. I was just so amazed on how this religious person, who from outside seems so happy and obedience to his God became so fragile...

In an interview published in the February 2011 issue of GQ, Haggard came out, saying,

"I think that probably, if I were 21 in this society, I would identify myself as a bisexual." [3]



New Life Churches in Colorado Springs, It is one of the largest churches in the US. It boasts over 14,000 members.

## *What About in Muslim World*

*On the other side of the globe, lying the most populous Islamic country, Indonesia. It is also one of the poorest nations on earth. Similar interesting case happens in 2009. Indonesian Child Protection Commission (Komisi Perlindungan Anak Indonesia / KPAI) made their report to police about Syekh Puji and his marriage to a 12-year-old. A religious leader that is pedophilia. He was accused of violating at least two articles of Child Protection Law, including "persuading a child to have sex and/or taking advantage of a person's economic condition for his own benefit."*

*The KPAI team seems to think that they have sufficient evidence that the marriage was consummated. To be legally correct the fact finding team used the words very likely that the Syekh had slept with his child bride, Lutfiana Ulfa, 12 years old girl.*

*There seems little doubt that this was a valid marriage in the sense of a religious marriage or as it is generally known, kawin siri. However, it is not a valid marriage in terms of Indonesian law. It would be a hard slog to try and prove that a kawin siri type marriage between a 43-year-old man and a 12-year-old girl is recognized in the Marriage Law (Law No. 1 of 1974). This would still be the case even where the parents or guardians are said to have given their approval.*

*What makes this case even more bizarre and sickening than it already is, is the manner in which the whole affair has been played out. Lutfiana was the winner of a bride selection competition where one of the judges was the*

Syekh's current wife (this would make her complicit in the procurement of a child for sexual exploitation) and some of his followers (also complicit in the procurement of a minor for sex).

This gets even more perverse when one learns that the parents are in considerable financial difficulty and as such were glad that the daughter was chosen. The only thing that could make this even more bizarre and sad is if the parents financial difficulties were in some way related to the man that they eventually sold their daughter to. A case that is unique to poor countries like Indonesia.

The implication quite clearly is that there was a transaction involved in that the parents are in financial difficulties and then not so after marrying off the daughter. The KPAI was hoping that the Police would act on this and charge all those involved under Articles 81 - 83 of the Child Protection Law. These articles in essence prohibit the procurement of child for sex. The articles would provide for a term of imprisonment of up to 15 years and a fine in millions of rupiahs.

The KPAI reckoned that before they could call the man a pedophile they would need to get a psychological test. This is one of those shake your head moments. The KPAI are one of the few to do something about this predator and then they come out with the idea that they need to psychologically test the man before they can be sure that he is a pedophile.

The evidence speaks for itself. He is married to a 12-year-old and is looking to procure a 9-year-old and a 7-year-old as his next wives. For my mind there is no need to do psychological test on this man, he is a serial

predator, a molester of children, a rapist of children, and worthy of jail time. I hear that the inmates of jails have a special liking for men who interfere with children. The idea that this man is in some way right because he claims he is doing nothing different from the Prophet is ludicrous.

One of Puji's lawyers, Novel Al Bakri, hinted that the girl's father, Suroso, would not be able to testify due to an alleged mental breakdown. Suroso was arrested by the police more than a month before that under suspicion of essentially selling his daughter into marriage [4].

"Suroso couldn't take the pressure. His testimony can't be held accountable for trial,"

said Novel, who represents both Suroso and Syekh Puji. He added that Suroso had been hospitalized.

"He says he's just a good muslim who married off his daughter. Ulfa had reached puberty so when a man asked for her hand in marriage, he married his daughter to Puji. Besides, it was consensual. Ulfa loves Puji," Novel argued.

Puji, a wealthy handicraft exporter and founder of a religious boarding school, has a substantial followers and sympathizers'. Hundreds of supporters rallied to his defense in July 2009 when he was arrested for violating an order to report weekly to the police.

Some 50 local clerics have condemned his actions and questioned his religious qualifications, however. The clerics met with provincial police in July 2009 to urge them to pursue the case.

*Puji has beefed up his legal team by hiring prominent lawyer OC Kaligis. Kaligis has represented Tommy Suharto, the son of former Indonesian autocrat Suharto, as well as Prita Mulyasari, the Tangerang woman accused of defaming a hospital on the internet in a widely-publicized case earlier that year.*

*My personal opinion on this was that the government done the job too little and too late. Although I was partially relieved that he went to jail.*



*Syekh Puji with the 12 year old bride.*

## *Are The Religious People Bad?*

*You probably think that I was being unfair to present two cases of religious leaders being in extreme situation. These two cases are not in any way reflecting typical religious leaders. These were extreme cases where the religious leaders showing their ugly faces. I am not saying at all that the religious people are worst than non-religious people.*

*I am not sure if you agree with my conclusion that formal religious cannot prevent people who were criminals. At the same time, good people will not turn to bad people even if there are no such things as formal, institutionalized religions. Hitler probably would have done the same thing even if he were not a Christian.*

*You might ask me then, why do I oppose an institutionalized religion, if regardless if there is religion or not, good people are still good and bad people are still bad. Well, at this moment, I am hoping that you will follow my logic by reading through this book.*





## Chapter two. Crisis of Belief



Still in Wixom, another weekend. I drove to nearby DVD rental store along with my daughters. I think it was 'Blockbuster', located on the Pontiac Trail and Beck Road, as I recall. Sadly, later on, after leaving the US in 2008, I heard that the place has now closed down for good due to the local economical condition.

I was never really a big fan of Hollywood movie. My daughters are though. I remember my daughters borrowed the teenage movies that unfortunately I was not interested in watching with them that time. So, I determined to rent movie for myself. I barely recalled the title, could be 'Mean Girl' or something.

At the corner of the new movies, there were displays of Mission Impossible or something. Certainly, you would guess that I was not interested on that kind of movie. It is not because Tom Cruise is not cute enough for me... Or because Tom Cruise believes in Scientology or something... in fact, I always admire people who are always in quest for spiritual needs.... My wife probably would love to watch his movie, but I am not.

I went to another aisles browsing for Hollywood movie that was not computerized, or at least not computerized up to the limit. A movie that still have human element in it. After hearing my daughters complaining about me spending so much time browsing for movie titles, I finally rented another Hollywood movie. It was 'Monster', a movie produced in 2003 that I chose.

The movie was starred by Charlize Theron and Christina Ricci. It tells Aileen Wuornos' story from childhood until her first murder conviction. Later on I learned that the film earned Theron the 2003 Academy Award for Best Actress for her performance as Aileen Wuornos. Sadly, although she played Aileen Wuornos as a sympathetic figure, she made no mention of Aileen Wuornos in her acceptance speech... Damn it, I hope she is not religious...

It was this movie that made me started to doubt about God being all-loving, God being all-caring, God being just and fair..., the things that were written in the Bible. All the positive characteristics of God written in Qur'an are not that different with that of the Christian Bible. My logical was, if God is really there, he must be all-caring and all-loving, just like what all of you teach your kids.

The movie was based on a true story of Aileen Wuornos who was born on February 29, 1956 in the state of Michigan, the exact state where we lived that time. She was an American serial killer who killed seven men in Florida between 1989 and 1990, claiming they raped or attempted to rape her while she was working as a prostitute. She was convicted and sentenced to death for six of the murders and executed by lethal injection on October 9, 2002.

## *Her Childhood*

*Aileen Wuornos was born as Aileen Carol Pittman on February 29, 1956. Her mother, Diane Wuornos, was 15 years old when she married Aileen's father, Leo Dale Pittman on June 3, 1954. Less than two years later, and two months before Aileen Wuornos was born, Diane filed for divorce.*

*Aileen had an older brother named Keith, who was born in February 1955. Aileen Wuornos never met her father, because he was in prison for the rape and attempted murder of an eight-year-old boy when she was born. Leo Pittman was considered to be a schizophrenic, who was convicted of sex crimes against children, was in and out of prison and hanged himself in prison [5]. In January 1960, when Aileen was almost 4 years old, Diane abandoned her children, leaving them with their maternal grandparents, Lauri and Britta Wuornos, who legally adopted Keith and Aileen. What a tragic story... you think right? Poor baby Aileen... There is more here. You tell me if God is being fair to her...*

*From the movie, I learned that at age of 12, Aileen Wuornos engaged in sexual activities in school in exchange for cigarettes, drugs, and food. Aileen had also engaged in sexual activities with her own brother. Aileen Wuornos claimed that she was sexually assaulted and beaten as a child by her grandfather. Aileen's grandfather was an alcoholic. Before beating her, he would force her to strip out of her clothes. At age 14, she became pregnant, having been raped by a friend of her grandfather. Again,..... God, where were you??... He must be busy*

listening to the choir from thousands of Churches throughout America.

Aileen Wuornos gave birth at a home for unwed mothers, and the child was placed for adoption. A few months after her baby was born, Aileen dropped out of school as her grandmother died of liver failure; and Aileen and her brother became wards of the court. When she was 15, her grandfather threw her out of the house; and she began supporting herself as a prostitute and living in the woods near her old home.

Aileen was described as incorrigible and had a fighting temper. Her anger often broke out unpredictable and frequently unprovoked. Aileen isolated herself from her peers and would only socialize when she was engaging in sexual activities in exchange for cigarettes or loose change from boys. She learned how to disassociate herself from her body to show blank emotions. The community disassociated themselves from her and labeled her as a 'whore' and a 'slut'. Aileen and her brother (Keith) had a close bonding, were very protective of each other and engaged in sexual activity together. Keith died from throat cancer during Aileen's teen years, and Aileen blamed herself for his death. Aileen began the usage of alcohol and it continued into her young adulthood. At the age of 20, Aileen was married to a man 50 years her senior which lasted for a month until he filed for divorce. Aileen's heavy consuming of alcohol and spending a lot of money caused the divorce. Aileen's husband not only filed for divorce from Aileen, but he also filed a restraining order against her. He claimed that Aileen was abusive by beating him with his own cane. In 1981, Aileen entered a convenience store in Florida and took \$35 plus

two packs of cigarettes. I really have no words for someone who, at this point says that God is all-loving...

She was convicted of robbery with a deadly weapon and sentenced to three years in state prison. Aileen was released from prison in 1984 and experienced her first homosexual relationship with a woman. Aileen Wuornos met Tyria Moore and fell in love at a Daytona gay bar. They moved in together, and Aileen Wuornos supported them with her prostitution earnings. During this time period, Aileen's violent behavior escalated. She forged two bad checks worth over \$5,000, absented from court hearing, prostituted, and committed grand theft auto. Aileen began to prostitute full time as a career at a gentlemen's club in Florida and was forced to leave when she reached the age of 30 due to aging. She then began a career of street prostitution. Aileen would post on the highway of Florida, waiting for someone to stop and offer her a ride. When Aileen was in the vehicle, she would immediately reveal to the driver that she was a prostitute, and that she needed money. Most of the money that Aileen obtained went to alcohol, marijuana, and drugs. When Aileen and the victims compromised the sex exchange, she would lure the victims to park in secluded areas, and encourage them to undress. As soon as they got undressed, she jumped out of the vehicles, and screamed

"I knew you were going to rape me!" as she shot them to death.

## Execution

Aileen Wuornos' appeal to the U.S. Supreme Court was denied in 1996. In 2001, she announced that she would not issue any further appeals against her death sentence. She petitioned the Florida Supreme Court for the right to fire her legal counsel and stop all appeals, saying,

"I killed those men, robbed them as cold as ice. And I'd do it again, too. There's no chance in keeping me alive or anything, because I'd kill again. I have hate crawling through my system...I am so sick of hearing this 'she's crazy' stuff. I've been evaluated so many times. I'm competent, sane, and I'm trying to tell the truth. I'm one who seriously hates human life and would kill again."

I cried watching the seen... I didn't want to talk to anyone... My sympathy goes to her...

Aileen Wuornos was executed by lethal injection on October 9, 2002. She was the tenth woman in the United States to be executed since the Supreme Court lifted the ban on capital punishment in 1976, and the second woman ever executed in Florida. She declined a last meal and instead was given a cup of coffee. Her final statement before the execution was

"Yes, I would just like to say I'm sailing with the rock, and I'll be back, like Independence Day with Jesus. June 6, like the movie. Big mother ship and all, I'll be back, I'll be back."

After her execution, Aileen Wuornos was cremated. Her ashes were taken by Dawn Botkins to her native Michigan and spread beneath a tree. She requested that Natalie

Merchant's song "Carnival" be played at her funeral. Natalie Merchant commented on this when asked why her song was played during the credits of the documentary *Aileen: Life and Death of a Serial Killer*:

## *What did I learned from Aileen's Case*

Where is the all-loving, all-caring God?? The One that my mom told me regardless of your belief, if you have a good intention God will reward you?? How can I explain this to my teenage daughters that at that time were watching their teenage movie?? It was 'mean girl' I think...

I had a complete sympathy to Aileen Wuornos... While, most of people are thinking about the victim's families, I only thought about Aileen. It was like that I wished I could turn the clock back to 1957 and protect the baby Aileen myself.

I could fully understand her and her characteristics. She was the victim, in my opinion. I can imagine, while she was being raped, and abused, the institutionalized religious people are living in their comfort praising the lord inside the churches, and mosques, and synagogues. These bourgeois groups are happily singing and chanting the name of the Lord, thinking that they have their tickets to paradise... They all agreed in condemning Aileen. While, I think her anger developed inside her is the responsibility of other people surrounding her and the society in general. Her anger that finally exploded into incredible violence was also our responsibility. To me, killing was her way of surviving. I believed that Aileen really believed that she had killed in self-defense...



My disappointment in institutional religion have been proliferating... It was three o'clock at night. I could not fall asleep at all... the graphic of Aileen could not go away from my head. The complaint to God and his unfairness made me sick.

I sneaked outside my bedroom for some cigarettes. I brought my guitar to the garage where I hid my cigarettes. My daughters would have been really sad if she knew that I was still a smoker. Slowly, I played 'Tickets to Heaven'. Although I could not play as good as Mark Knopfler, at least I got his feeling with his song:

.... ♪ ♪ ♪ ♪ ...♪...

I can see what you're looking to find

In the smile on my face

In my peace of mind

In my state of grace

I send what I can

To the man from the ministry

He's a part of heaven's plan

And he talks to me

Now I send what I can to the man

With the diamond ring

He's a part of heaven's plan

And he sure can sing

Now it's all I can afford

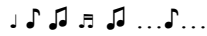
But the lord has sent me eternity

*It's to save the little children  
In a poor country*

*I got my ticket to heaven  
And everlasting life  
I got a ride all the way to paradise  
I got my ticket to heaven  
And everlasting life  
All the way to paradise*

*Now there's nothing left for luxuries  
Nothing left to pay my heating bill  
But the good lord will provide  
I know he will  
So send what you can  
To the man with the diamond ring  
They're tuning in across the land  
To hear him sing*

*I got my ticket to heaven  
And everlasting life  
I got a ride all the way to paradise  
I got my ticket to heaven  
And everlasting life  
All the way to paradise.....*



*That is exactly what the institutionalized religion people do,... I said to myself... from the imams, the priests, and the rabbis, selling tickets to paradise... and forgot about baby Aileen. While for me, I don't want to go to paradise. I do not care about paradise... I just want God to help baby Aileen and other thousands of baby Aileen alike in other places...*

## Chapter three. How God Becomes Angry at the Sinners



*If you just jumped to this chapter without reading Chapter two, I suggest you to turn the page to Chapter two again. If you are with me now, You could understand my feeling about how guilty feeling I had... I didn't feel guilty because I did not donate enough money to the priest with the diamond ring and shiny limousine. I didn't feel guilty because I did not participate in church worshipping or mosque prayer. I only felt guilty because I felt like I robbed the happiness of others during my praying. I felt so guilty because I prayed. The prayer that I used to think as a beautiful prose became an ugly one.*

*" Oh Lord, Lord, support us all day long  
until shadows lengthen,  
evening comes,  
the busy world hushed,  
the fever of life is over  
and our life's work is done.*

*Lord, love me and my family."*

*The prayer that was once sounded normal and beautiful now sounding really ugly and selfish. At that moment, I thought that institutionalized religion is an egocentric approach. Everything was about ME, ME and ME... Thanking God for your good fortune is implicating him for the misfortune of others... Christianity and Islam, that were once near and dear to my heart now became really ugly. They are just for the middle classes who want to secure their lives, while for the poor's; it is only selling the dream, and not the solution.*

*God doesn't make people rich or happy. Being rich, or at least have enough food on the dining table is unanticipated. It does not depend on how you worship God. It does not depend on your privileged relation with God. It does not depend on your prayer. In many cases, it does not even depend on how hard worker you are. It depends more on where you were born and the circumstances of life that were surrounding you. A truck driver in the US can go to Europe for vacation normally. A more hard working truck driver who was born and lived in Indonesia would never even thought about taking their family for Europe vacation, no matter how hard he works and how obedience he is with his God.*

*Both biblical and Qur'anic approaches to life are bourgeois. An Eternal Life.... I am not sure if you want that. I don't... It is also selling the concept of reward and punishment. It is as simple as if you are doing good thing and praying, the good Lord will provide the reward. If you are not obedience to His law, you will be punished....*

*For the rest of the article....*

*Please purchase the book at the following link.*

<http://www.lulu.com/product/paperback/be-a-happier-and-a-better-person-without-formal-religion-an-agnostic-view-with-the-christianity-and-islamic-perspectives/16058556>

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*Actually, the author does NOT make money at all with this project.*

*You just pay the printing cost.*